

**NOAA FISHERIES ANNOUNCES REGIONAL QUOTA ADJUSTMENTS FOR THE 2005  
COMMERCIAL SHARK FISHERY AND 2005 FIRST TRIMESTER FISHING SEASON NOTIFICATION**

The Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Management Division will adjust the regional and trimester quotas for large coastal sharks (LCS) and small coastal sharks (SCS) based on updated landings information, create a framework mechanism for annual adjustment of regional quotas, remove the requirement to publish season length information at least 30 days prior to the season start date, and announce quotas and season lengths for the first trimester season of 2005.

Preliminary landings data indicate an increase in shark fishing activity in the Gulf of Mexico region in 2003 coupled with a reduction in activity in the North Atlantic and South Atlantic regions. NOAA Fisheries will adjust the regional quotas based on updated landings data from 1999 through 2003. For LCS in the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic, and North Atlantic regions this changes the percentages to 52, 41, and 7 percent of the overall LCS landings quota for each of the regions, respectively. For SCS, the regional quotas for the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic, and North Atlantic regions would be adjusted to 10, 87, and 3 percent of the overall SCS landings quota for each of the three regions, respectively. Trimester quotas will be equally divided between seasons in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic; North Atlantic trimester quotas will be based on historical landings. In addition to including updated landings data to revise regional quotas, the rule also proposes a framework mechanism for annual adjustment of quotas between regions of up to 10 percent in the event of concurrent over- and underharvests.

The commercial shark fishery will open in all regions on January 1, 2005. Based on changes to the quotas, NOAA Fisheries estimates the following closure dates: the Gulf of Mexico LCS fishery will close on February 28, 2005, at 11:30 p.m. local time, the South Atlantic LCS fishery will close on February 15, 2005, at 11:30 p.m. local time, and the North Atlantic LCS fishery will close on April 30, 2005, at 11:30 p.m. local time. Closure dates for SCS and pelagic sharks will be determined, as necessary.

This FAX notice is a courtesy to the HMS fishery participants to help keep you informed about your fishery. Official notice of Federal fishing actions is made through filing such notice with the Office of Federal Register. For further information on this final rule and its requirements, contact Chris Rilling, Karyl Brewster-Geisz, or Mike Clark at 301-713-2347. Copies of the final rule and final environmental assessment/regulatory impact review/final regulatory flexibility analysis are available upon request from the Highly Migratory Species Management Division, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910 (phone: 301-713-2347, fax: 301-713-1917). The information will also be posted on the HMS website at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/>.

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